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THE PRESENT MOVEMENT FOR ORGANISING SECONDARY EDUCATION IN ENGLAND

The recent announcement by the Prime Minister in the house of commons that a royal commission would shortly be appointed to report upon the best means of supplying the present defects in secondary education, shows that the subject is rapidly coming within the domain of practical politics. It is true that royal commissions are sometimes convenient methods of shelving inconvenient problems; but as education in England has, so far, fortunately escaped being the football of political parties, and as there is no doubt about the seriousness of the alleged defect it is hoped that the royal commission will prove the speediest means to the desired end. Enquiry rightly precedes legislation. At present the only thing known for certain about English secondary schools is that they are very few and many are very inefficient. A government investigation has never taken place. In 1867 a commission enquired into the state of the endowed schools and the result was that many of them have been reorganized under the direction of the charity commissioners. But the number of these schools is small: they are frequently located where they are not wanted: and only a few are available for girls. If the charity commissioners had in addition to revising their schemes arranged for periodical inspection of these endowed schools the reform would have been much more valuable. By means of these endowed schools, by proprietary schools, and by private venture schools, the work of secondary education, is at present carried on in England: and all these three are subject to striking defects. Their lack of inspection, coördination, connection with the elementary schools or the universities, and their numerical inferiority are some of the most striking. There is no *guarantee* for efficiency or even for the healthiness of the buildings. The endowed schools are to a great extent independent of public support, the proprietary schools have to keep their shareholders in view, and the private venture schools are largely at the mercy of the parent's whim. At the same time it cannot be denied that many of all these classes of schools are doing excellent work. The managers

of many are actuated by real interest in the work of education. Professional rivalry, school traditions, the voluntary examination and inspection of schools by university examiners, and the need of a certain amount of efficiency to obtain public support operate in various degrees upon schools. But still there is no unimpeachable guarantee that any school is really efficient.

The supply of such secondary schools as there are is ludicrously small. Thus in London it is doubtful whether the attendance is six per thousand: in the German town of Carlsruhe it is sixty!

Hence in the present unsatisfactory state of the matter much is to be hoped from the royal commission. An authoritative statement alone of the aspect of the case will be valuable: well-digested advice for future action will be more valuable: and early legislative action will go far to make up for years of neglect.

This commission is the outcome of a remarkable conference held at Oxford last October. For the first time representatives of all bodies interested in the subject met and discussed how the problem affected all the various educational agencies in the country. Such a comparison of ideas was naturally of immense value and showed how rapidly opinion is shaping itself. No one, for instance, advocated a continuance of the present principle of *laissez-faire*: all tacitly admitted that government control in some form was necessary. No one denied the value of teachers' registration. Another point on which there has been growth of public opinion is the attitude towards private-venture schools. Several speakers acknowledged the claims of these to consideration. It would be unjust were those schools, which have done their best to fill the gap, to be quietly ignored in any general scheme. But no one pleads for the inefficient private school. Such an one ought to be remorselessly suppressed.

Since the Endowed Schools Act of 1869 the only visible progress until the last few months has been the reorganization of many of the endowed schools. But it is possible that the royal commission following so soon after the Oxford conference may rapidly focus that attention to the subject, which must have been slowly permeating people's minds during these twenty-four years. There are besides two important semi-political agencies pushing the question to the front. One is the operation of the technical education acts and the other is the ambition of the elementary

school boards. The first are in operation over all England with the partial exception of London and were due to a desire to improve the technical education of the skilled workman. Success is however very incomplete and is likely to be so until it is recognised that technical education must come after a general education and not be a substitute for it. This indeed is clearly pointed out by all writers and thinkers and its truth will be confirmed by experience. In London gigantic polytechnics are being established, but instead of being technical universities as in Germany, the attractions in these will be largely social and recreative: bicycle clubs, football clubs and so forth being some of the affiliated institutions. To hope that instruction combined with amusement can be of permanent educational benefit is delusive. This principle was tried some fifty or sixty years when "Mechanics' Institutes" were somewhat extensively established in England. There is now probably not one in existence. After the novelty of inauguration had worn off, these having no root in true educational or commercial principles, gradually expired. It is probable then that the managers of these polytechnics will find it to their interest to throw their influence into the improvement of secondary education in order to keep up the supply of proper material for the technical classes.

With regard to the elementary schools it is being constantly found that the present superior limit of age and acquirements is unsatisfactory. Just when the child's mind is beginning to expand after previous careful training then the system fails to carry him on. To meet this want "higher grade schools" are established in many places, and the teaching of "specific subjects," which include all ordinary secondary grade subjects except Greek, is allowed even in the usual elementary schools. It will thus be clearly seen that elementary education is trenching on the regions of the higher schools. Either the elementary schools must be allowed a higher range, which, in many people's idea, would be unwise, or secondary schools must be prepared to continue the work of the elementary. What authority shall govern these secondary schools? No doubt there will be a central authority consisting of a minister or ministry of education: but a local authority of some kind will no doubt be the proximate governor. Shall the ratepayers be requested to elect a special board;

or shall the work be that of a department of the county council, reinforced by local educational experts; or shall the powers of the elementary school board be extended? Lastly shall teachers, as such, have any share in the management? If this last principle had been recognised by Mr. Hobhouse in the bill he has introduced into parliament, probably the house would have listened to his petition that the second reading might be agreed to in order that a joint committee of both houses might investigate the matter. But the royal commission (whose names are not yet gazetted) now occupies the field and no onward movement can be expected till its report has been made. Let us hope as the Dean of St. Paul's (Dr. Gregory) said at Oxford that its action may be "short and sharp."

Even if Dr. Gregory's wish be gratified, some years will probably elapse before the matter is seriously taken in hand, as a reference to the following list of the chief dates in recent educational legislation will show:—

- 1858—Commission on Popular (i. e. Elementary) Education, leading ultimately to the Elementary Education Act of 1870, by which Elementary School Boards were established.
- 1861—Commission to examine the nine great public schools (i. e. Winchester, Eton, Harrow, &c.); followed by Public Schools Act of 1868.
- 1864—Schools (i. e. Endowed) Inquiry Commission, dealing incidentally and partially with other secondary schools; followed by Endowed Schools Act of 1869.
- 1872—Universities' (Oxford and Cambridge) Commission—Revised Statutes 1881.
- 1884—Technical Education Commission: Technical Education Acts, 1889.
- 1889—Welch Intermediate Education Act.

When the new system, whatever it may be, is devised some plan will have to be found for passing boys on from the elementary to the secondary schools. At present the elementary schools are free; but in the secondary day schools fees varying from £5 to £30 per annum are charged. It is very doubtful whether the elementary boy can afford to pay even the lowest fee. The rem-

edy proposed is an extensive system of scholarships of sufficient value to educate and maintain the boy at certain schools. This is likely however to be but a partial remedy and probably a more thorough measure will be for the new educational local authority to either acquire existing schools or establish new ones and work them on suitable lines. This will enable the middle classes to share more largely in the benefits of the cheap higher schools than is at present contemplated; but as the middle classes will have to be taxed for the support of the schools there is no sound reason why they should not share in the advantages. The middle classes in England require legislative assistance as much as the working man, but the political tendency is to put them in the background. It is they who are mainly concerned with this particular aspect of the educational question: but their want of interest in such matters is notorious. Had there been anything like a popular demand, secondary education would have been organized years ago. Even now the very expression and its signification is almost unknown to the public. But still the present position of the question is encouraging and it is possible to hold the hope that wise action will stir the English public to a proper interest in this great matter, and rouse them from that apathy which has been rightly described as the greatest obstacle to educational progress in England.

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